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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 008569

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY'S SOUTHEAST: BETTER, BUT STILL BACKWARD AS GOT PREPARES TO LIFT STATE OF EMERGENCY

REF: ANKARA 8447

Classified by DCM Robert Deutsch; reasons 1.5 b and d.

**¶11. (C) Summary:** The GOT is expected to complete the phased lifting of the state of emergency November 30 by allowing the regime to expire in the last two southeastern provinces where it continues -- Diyarbakir and Sirnak. While the regime's demise is welcome, five longstanding problems will continue to plague the region: underdevelopment, the village guards, traditional tribal structures, political alienation, and displaced persons. End Summary.

**¶12. (U)** Based on a five-province survey by Embassy Human Rights Officer, tensions in the southeast are down significantly from years past, but residents are concerned about longstanding impediments to the region's economic and social development. This cable, which builds on reftel report from Consulate Adana, is based on November 12-16 interviews with human rights activists, security officials, mayors, sub-governors, attorneys, and religious leaders in Diyarbakir, Batman, Siirt, Sirnak, and Mardin provinces.

**¶13. (U)** Conditions in the southeast have improved greatly over the past three years, following the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan and the virtual end of armed clashes between PKK terrorists and security forces. For example, at the security checkpoint outside the town of Eruh, Siirt Province, police today check IDs and keep a record of travelers. In years past, according to Eruh Mayor Hamit Nas, police used to thoroughly search all vehicles and passengers, and enforce strict quotas on transported goods, a process that lasted 1-2 hours. Today, relations between the elected mayor and the Ankara-appointed provincial governor and sub-governor are good, Nas said. The sub-governor operates a restaurant providing free food to 120 families, and has organized a soccer team that includes both members of the security forces and local residents.

**¶14. (U)** Still, Nas said, economic conditions have not improved much since the GOT lifted the state of emergency in Siirt in November 1999, and very few residents forced from their homes during the height of the conflict have been able to return. Eruh provides a reminder that eliminating the state of emergency will have limited effect unless followed up with other measures. By completing the phasing out of the regime, the GOT will be shutting down the state of emergency region Governor's Office and eliminating special powers of search, detention and interrogation given to security officials in state of emergency provinces. However, our contacts identify five obstacles that will continue to block progress.

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OBSTACLE 1: UNDERDEVELOPMENT  
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**¶15. (C)** The region has suffered from official neglect dating back to the founding of the republic, long before the emergence of the PKK and the establishment of the state of emergency. The GOT has focused on controlling, rather than developing, the region, out of fear that the mostly Kurdish population would separate from Turkey. Mayors and human rights activists cite illiteracy as a major problem, and say the education system in the region has always lagged behind the rest of the country. They also say the GOT has recently begun restricting fuel trade across the Habur gate on the Iraqi border, shutting off an important source of income. Seyhmust Diken, advisor to the Diyarbakir mayor, said the region is unable to reap benefits from its natural resources -- including agricultural and mineral wealth -- because of Turkey's centrally controlled economy. The GAP dam project is expected to provide irrigation, but has not made a significant impact to date. Diken said a history of conflict and lack of GOT support also prevent the southeast from

drawing tourists by exploiting its historic riches, ranging from the ancient walls of Diyarbakir to the Syriac Christian monasteries of Mardin. The city of Diyarbakir, fed up with attempts to gain support from Ankara, is currently restoring the city walls on its own. Diken said GOT officials have so little regard for local governments in the southeast that one Ankara bureaucrat refused to believe that Diyarbakir was nine months away from completing the wall project, and asked for a photograph.

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OBSTACLE 2: THE VILLAGE GUARD  
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16. (C) Human rights activists and local elected officials universally condemn the village guards as a menace. The GOT formed and armed the village guards, who number about 65,000 in the southeast, as part of its campaign against the PKK. They are widely regarded as undisciplined and dangerous, and have repeatedly been accused of murder, beating, rape, corruption, drug trafficking, and other abuses. Critics of the force say village guards across the region are living in the homes, and farming the land, of displaced residents, and will continue to block the return of residents forced out during the PKK conflict. Security officials and sub-governors admit the guards are a problem, and say they are no longer needed to fight terrorists. But they argue that the guards served their country in the fight against the PKK and the GOT has no choice but to phase them out slowly. "If we fire them, they will be an even bigger problem," said Ugur Bulut, Sirnak deputy governor for security matters. Hakki Uzun, state of emergency region deputy governor, said the GOT will not hire any new guards and will gradually close down the force as its members resign or retire.

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OBSTACLE 3: TRIBAL STRUCTURE  
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17. (C) Traditional tribal/feudal structures, though fading, continue in the region. Security officials cite this as a major challenge. Ali Tatli, Batman deputy security director, said conservative Kurdish families choose to solve problems on their own, rather than go to the police. This, he said, explains the continued problem of "honor killings" -- the murder by immediate family members of women suspected of being unchaste. Mayors and human rights activists agree, but say the GOT exploits these ancient traditions to maintain control. They accuse the government of providing political and financial support to selected tribal leaders (agas), many of whom are given positions in the village guards. Tribal leaders exercise tight control over thousands of uneducated followers, who work their land and vote according to their instructions.

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OBSTACLE 4: POLITICAL ALIENATION  
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18. (C) The pro-Kurdish DEHAP (formerly HADEP) party won a landslide victory in the southeast in the November 3 elections, but, as in the past, failed to pass the threshold of 10 percent of the national vote required to enter parliament. Though DEHAP officials say harassment of the party has decreased, government officials still regularly raid DEHAP offices and detain party members. As a result, people in the region have no faith in the democratic process, contacts agreed. To make matters worse, two independent candidates elected to parliament from the region were nominated by the village guards, according to human rights activists.

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OBSTACLE 5: RETURNS  
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19. (C) The GOT estimates that 378,000 people were displaced from the southeast between 1984 and 1999 due to the conflict; human rights organizations put the number at more than one million. The GOT claims that 51,000 displaced residents have returned. Turkish and international human rights organizations have consistently criticized the GOT's returns program as inadequate and secretive. Provincial officials say they are doing their best to assist returns. Bulut said Sirnak officials have approved about half the return applications of displaced residents. The other half, he said, were turned down because their villages lack essential services -- such as water, power, or roads -- or because

their homes are in areas that remain unsafe. Rejected applications will be reviewed again as conditions improve. But local representatives of the Human Rights Association and the Immigrants Association for Social Cooperation and Culture claim the GOT opposes large-scale returns, and that most returnees have received little or no GOT support. They say displaced villagers cannot receive permission to return unless they sign a document stating that they fled their homes because of actions taken by the PKK, not the GOT, and that they will not seek GOT assistance for their return.

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COMMENT  
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¶10. (C) The measures utilized by the GOT to fight separatism and terrorism in the southeast have also contributed to the region's backwardness. The virtual end of the PKK conflict provides an opportunity for the GOT to chart a new course and begin to close the gap between the southeast and the rest of the country, a process one sub-governor said could take decades. This would require considerable funding combined with a little imagination and common sense; for example, the village guards could be re-trained and assigned to tasks more suitable for present conditions. Unfortunately, it appears that GOT officials have not yet adopted a "post war" strategy for the region.

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